

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY LAGOS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 430

INFO AMEMBASSY ABIDJAN

AMEMBASSY ACCRA

AMEMBASSY COTONOU

AMEMBASSY DAKAR

AMEMBASSY LOME

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY NIAMEY

AMEMBASSY N

AMEMBASSY YAOUNDE

AMCONSUL DOUALA

AMCONSUL KADUNA

AMCONSUL IBADAN

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E.O. 11652: GDS

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SUBJECT: NIGERIA'S NEW LEADERS: A PRELIMINARY ESTIMATE

REF: A. LAGOS 7222, B. LONDON 10727, C. A-132

MAY 6, 1972

SUMMARY: NIGERIA'S NEW RULERS MAY HAVE DELETERIOUS EFFECT ON
INTERNAL NIGERIAN STABILITY AND US-NIGERIAN RELATIONS. CHIEF
PROBLEM IS NEW HEAD OF STATE, BRIGADIER MURTALA MOHAMMED,
AND IMPETUOUS, RUTHLESS MAN INDELIBLY IDENTIFIED WITH THE NIGERIAN
NORTH, WHO EARNED THE FEAR OF NIGERIA'S IBOS DURING
CIVIL WAR. NEW NUMBER TWO, CHIEF OF STAFF SUPREME HEADQUARTERS,
BRIGADIER OLUSEGUN OBASANJO, SHOULD NOT AROUSE TRIBAL FEARS,

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BUT MAY PRESENT SPECIAL PROBLEM FOR U.S. EMBASSY IN VIEW OF HIS

RECENT ATTEMPT, BACKED BY TROOPS, TO EVICT EMBASSY AGENCIES FROM MOLONEY STREET ANNEX. OTHER MEMBERS OF LEADERSHIP, HIGHLY-RESPECTED PROFESSIONALS, WOULD BE A CREDIT TO ANY GOVERNMENT. THEIR BENEFICIAL INFLUENCE MAY BE OUTWEIGHED, HOWEVER, BY PRESENCE OF MOHAMMED AT TOP. BECAUSE OF THE ATTITUDES OF MOHAMMED, OBASANJO AND THE NEW I. G. OF POLICE, MALLAM M. D. YUSUFU, NIGERIA CAN BE EXPECTED TO TAKE A NOTICEABLY MORE VOCAL AND HARDER POSTURE ON SOUTHERN AFRICAN QUESTIONS, RESULTING IN (POSSIBLY) INCREASED FRICTION IN RELATIONS WITH US. END SUMMARY

1. AT 1850 HOURS LOCAL NIGERIAN MILITARY ANNOUNCED ITS NEW LEADERS (REF. A). METHOD OF THEIR SELECTION--WHETHER FOR EXAMPLE NEW LEADERS ARE THE SAME AS THE INSTIGATORS OF THE COUP-IS UNKNOWN, AS IS ROLE OF RUMORED BEHIND-THE-SCENES PLAYERS SUCH AS MAJOR GENERAL HASSAN KATSINA. HOWEVER, IMPLICATIONS FOR INTERNAL NIGERIAN STABILITY ARE POTENTIALLY DISQUIETING,, AS ARE IMPLICATIONS FOR US-NIGERIAN RELATIONS. PROBLEM IN

BOTH RESPECTS IS NOT WITH THE NUMBER 3, 4, MAND 5 MEN IN THE NEW LINEUP--THE NEW SERVICE CHIEFS, BRIGADIER THEOPHILUS DANJUMA (ARMY), COMMODORE MICHAEL ADELANWA (NAVY) AND COLONEL JOHN YISA-DOKO (AIR FORCE)-- WHO ARE HIGHLY RESPECTED PROFESSIONALS, NOTED FOR THEIR HONESTY, THEIR FARI DEALING TOWARDS NIGERIA'S VARIOUS TRIBAL GROUPS, AND THEIR PRO-WESTERN ATTITUDES. POTENTIALLY TROUBLING INFLUENCE IS THE NEW NUMBER ONE, HEAD OS STATE BRIGADIER MURTALA MOHAMMED. OVER THE PAST NINE YEARS BRIGADIER MOHAMMED HAS PROVED HIMSELF RUTHLESS, ARROGANT, ANDCORRUPT. INDELIBLY IDENTIFIED WITH NORTHERN HEGEMONY, HIS BECOMING HEAD OF STATE MAY WELL FRIGHTEN IBOS WHO REMEMBER THE BEHAVIOR OF HIS TROOPS DURING THE CIVIL WAR. MOHAMMED HAS ARGUED RATHER WILDLY FOR IMMEDIATE, UNILATERAL NIGERIAN MILITARY INTERVENTION IN SOUTH AFRICA (REF. C).

2. MOHAMMED'S CAREER DURING THE PERIOD OF THE FIRST TWO COUPS AND THE CIVIL WAR IS WORTH RECALLING. WHEN NORTHERN TROOPS OVERTHREW AND KILLED MAJOR GENERAL JOHN AGUIYI IRONSI EXACTLY NINE YEARS AGO YESTERDAY, A CONFRONTATION TOOK PLACE BETWEEN MOHAMMED AND YAKUBU GOWON, THEN BOTH LIEUTENANT COLONELS. MOHAMMED ATTEMPTING TO LEAD THE NORTHERN TROOPS IN SECESSION, GOWON

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STRIVING TO WIN THEIR SUPPORT FOR NIGERIAN UNITY. MOHAMMED BACKED DOWN AND AGREED TO SUPPORT GOWON, BUT SEEMS TO HAVE TRIED TO SUPPLANT GOWON IN NOVEMBER 1966. THAT EFFORT FAILED. SINCE THEN MOHAMMED'S NAME HAS BEEN FREQUENTLY LINKED WITH COUP PLOTTERS. MOHAMMED HAS DONE LITTLE TO DISGUISE HIS CONTEMPT FOR GOWON, WHOM HE ACCUSES OF FAILURE TO PROVIDE STRONG LEADERSHIP. HE IS REPUTED TO HAVE ONCE SAID, "I PUT GOWON IN OFFICE...". THE OTHER HALF OF HIS BOAST WOULD NOW SEEM TO HAVE COME TRUE:

"... AND I CAN TAKE HIM OUT." AFTER WAR BROKE OUT MOHAMMED EARNED A SHORT-LIVED REPUTATION AS THE "MONTY OF THE MID-WEST", DRIVING THE BIAFRAN INVADERS OUT OF THE STATE AND CAPTURING ASABA ON THE NIGER. THOUGH THERE IS NO INDICATION THAT MOHAMMED WAS DIRECTLY RESPONSIBLE, THE CAPTURE OF ASABA WAS ACCOMPANIED BY THE WORST MASSACRE OF THE CIVIL WAR--800 IBO MEN AND BOYS LINED UP AND MACHINEGUNNED. THREE TIMES IN LATE 1967 MOHAMMED LAUNCHED AMPHIBIOUS ASSAULTS ACROSS THE NIGER WITH THE OBJECTIVE OF CAPTURING ONITSHA, AND THREE TIMES HE WAS REPULSED, WITH THE HEAVIEST NIGERIAN LOSSES OF THE WAR: APPROXIMATELY 2,000 KILLED. IN LATE MARCH, 1968 MOHAMMED'S 2D DIVISION FINALLY CAPTURED ONITSHA FROM THE LANDWARD SIDE, AGAIN WITH HEAVY LOSSES. IN THE AFTERMATH OF THE FIGHTING MOHAMMED'S SOLDIERS MASSACRED APPROXIMATELY 300 IBO INHABITANTS. MOHAMMED IS THUS AS CLOSELY-LINKED AS ANY SINGLE PERSON WITH THE IBO MYTH AND FEAR OF GENOCIDE.

3. RELIEVED OF HIS COMMANDE IN JUNE 1968 FOLLOWING A SERIES OF INSUBORDINATE ACTS, MOHAMMED RETURNED TO HIS PRE-WAR POST AS INSPECTOR (CHIEF) OF ARMY SIGNALS. IN THE YEARS SINCE HE HAS RUN THE NIGERIAN SIGNALS VERY EFFECTIVELY; DATT DESCRIBES THE SIGNAL CORPS AS THE MOST PROFESSIONAL IN NIGERIAN ARMY. BRITISH SOURCES ACCUSE MOHAMMED OF TAKING HEAVY BRIBES FROM AMERICAN COMPANIES IN CONNECTION WITH SIGNALS PROCUREMENT, AND IT DOES APPEAR THAT HE HAS SET DEALS UP QUICKLY AND THEN PRESENTED THE MINISTRY OF DEFENSE WITH FIATS ACCOMPLIS. FOR EXAMPLE, THE ALACRITY WITH WHICH HE HAS APPROVED AND TOUTED THE AMERICAN TCOM TETHERED-BALLON SYSTEM OF TELECOMMUNICATIONS (REF. D) HAS SURPRISED SOME OBSERVERS. WHETHER THIS SOMEWHAT GRANDIOSE PROJECT ROUSES CHARGES OF CORRUPTION FROM NIGERIANS WHEN IT GETS UNDERWAY REMAINS TO BE SEEN. CORRUPT HIMSELF OR NOT, MOHAMMED SPEAKS SCATHINGLY OF THE PREVALENT CORRUPTION IN NIGERIA AND TIES IT TO GOWON'S ALLEGED INEFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP. WHAT CREDENTIALS THIS WILL GIVE HIM IN A REGIME
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WHOSE OTHER MEMBERS COULD LEGITIMATELY BILL THEMSELVES AS CORRUPTION-FIGHTERS REAMINS TO BE SEEN AS DOES QUESTIONS OF MOHAMMED'S ACCEPTABILITY BY MAJORITY NIGERIANS AS LEADER OF COUNTRY.

4. AT LEAST THREE OF THE NEW LEADERS, MOHAMMED, OBASANJO AND POLICE I-G MALLAM M.D. YUSUFU, ARE NOTED FOR THEIR STRONG VIEWS ON SOUTHERN AFRICA AND THEIR SENSITIVITY TO ANYTHING SMACKING OF RACISM. AS A CONFERENCE ON NIGERIAN FOREIGN POLICY THREE YEARS AGO (REF. C), MOHAMMED AND OBASANJO WERE TOGETHER IN ATTENDANCE AND ENGAGED IN AN EXTRAORDINARY EXCHANGE ON SOUTHER AFRICA, MOHAMMED CALLING FOR SOMETHING LIKE IMMEDIATE, UNILATERAL NIGERIAN MILITARY INTERVENTION IN SOUTH AFRICA, OBASANJO RETORTING, "O. K. YOU CAN GO TO SOUTH AFRICA, BUT I'M STAYING HERE." ACCOUNTS INDICATE THAT

IN THE AGREEMENT OBASANJO ALSO REVEALED AN INTENSE EMOTIONAL COMMITMENT
TO MORE MILITANT MEASURES IN SOUTHERN AFRICA. THIS COMMITMENT
OF OBASANJO'S WAS RECENTLY DISCUSSED IN AMBASSADOR EASUM'S
CABLE, "US-NIGERIAN RELATIONSHIPS POST MOLONEY," (REF.B)
IN A SECTION DEALING WITH POSSIBLE UNDERLYING CAUSES OF THE
EMBASSY ANNEX CONFRONTATION.
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